

2016 Group Sow Housing Seminar
Discussion Panel 2: Sept 7, 2016

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(Edited for clarity and conciseness)

Moderator: Here's what I think I'll do to warm this up. We're going to have the producers, anyway, talk about their particular system. So how many sows they have, if they're farrow to finish or farrow to wean, what their production's like in terms of pigs per sow per year coming out of that system that, I grant you, isn't the only metric that we measure these by. But just give us a little background of whether you have ESF or trough feeding or Gestal system. What your sow herd's like and what your production's like. Can we start with that?

Adam: So I'm Adam Schlegel. Our sow barn is between Shakespeare and New Hamburg, and it's got a capacity of about 1800 sows right now. We have 500 spaces of loose housing on an ESF system, it's actually the Canarm Sow Choice feeder. And that came to us as a renovation project. The barn itself was initially built in 1979 and the farrowing rooms were in the oldest part of the barn and they were frankly completely worn out. So in 2014, we built a new farrowing wing on the barn as an expansion to the barn, but also to replace those old rooms. Then, when you're expanding like that, you've got to figure out what to do with the old space. Well, we decided this is an opportunity, we can get our feet wet with loose housing and figure out what we can do with it. So in attending meetings like these, trying to figure out how we want to approach things, we settled on the ESF system.

We currently manage with two pens of about 250 animals each, in large dynamic groups. And frankly, we've been running for about a year now with ESF system and it's taken a lot of work but things are working fairly well in the barn. Our numbers are very good, frankly we're pushing 30, not quite making it there, but 30's the number to try to hit and it seems realistic, so that's what we're aiming for.

John O: So, John Otten, so we have two sow herds, a 1500 sow, and 1000 sow, so they are not in the loose housing at this point in time. Looking at all the options that we're going to change over. Okay. So both these herds are in good productive state at this point in time and we're looking at opportunities that we're going to do in making the conversion. At the same time, though, we've travelled to various operations here in Ontario and also down in Quebec and looked at the different features of operations that have been converted or built anew in loose housing, and so that's where my position is at this point.

Doug: We're farrow to feeder. We started out at about 700 sows and we're down to about 600 now. When we were building, I made the comment

that we came from loose housing in an old finishing two-story bank barn, small pens, so loose housing wasn't new to us. What we did, we had a PRRS break around the time that we were doing the build and we lost our gilt supply twice, so that's been a cost and a curse to us, and we're just coming out of that now. We ended up, when we fired up our loose housing farm, we already had sows that were in excess of 9 parities. We still have a few around. We had two sows that got to 17.

As much as I hate to profess, we have actually had a herd got that old on us. Our saviour was the loose housing environment. Those sows could farrow on their own, still dump out 14 and 15 pigs. Their muscle tone and stuff was fabulous. So some of the transition getting there wasn't fun, wasn't pretty and wasn't sexy, by any means. And now we're getting to a point where we're starting, we're doing about 28 pigs per sow per year. So we're not a fancy herd by any means, but we're getting to be stable.

John V: Yeah, I got 250 sows, farrow to finish, it's actually all under one roof, so everything's just running down the hall. Yeah, I started switching my loose housing, my sow barn used to be a finishing barn back in '83 when it was first built, and I switched it over in '96 to stalls, and it's still the original cement.

And now, when I went to loose housing, all I had to do was knock out the center hallway and pour a 3 inch cap over the existing cement. So my renovation has not costed me too much. As far as just taking stalls out and pour a little bit of cap of cement. I've got three ESF's, two for the sows and one for the gilts. I find that I started with one just to see what I was working with, I found that the gilts and sows together don't necessarily interact very good or very well. I found that the gilts were a little too timid to go into the ESF, and talking to my nutritionist, he suggested feeding gilts separate from the sows. What I'm working with, it actually has two boxes on it, it actually can feed two different rations, but I still don't like the two together. So, my production, I'm right around probably 27 pigs per sow per year right now. But my true evaluation is not necessarily how many pigs you get to market, it's how much meat you put on the shelf per ton of feed. And so the last four years, my average probably meat per ton of feed is 300 kilos of meat for every ton of feed. So for me, that takes in evaluation of how much you're losing, wasting feed, how many death loss, how fast they're growing. So, that's what I call evaluation.

Moderator: Questions?

Audience: In light of today's comments, this being done to enhance the quality of life of the sow, what have you seen in terms of culling reasons and why do you see that? And the second part of it is, have you changed the age at which the sow leaves the herd?

Doug: I'll start that one. I have 17 parities, I can handle that one. And like I said, it wasn't anything I wanted to be proud about, but I had purchased

gilts in previous and always frustrated me with the performance. One of the biggest things that I noticed is that when we transition the herd, our sows became almost arthritic. It took about two weeks. They were just not used to it. They stood in a stall. It was funny, when you used to let them out of the stall and run them back up the hallway to put them in the loose housing environment, you know how you get the sows where their feet go out sideways and can't get them pulled up underneath you, didn't matter whether it was gilts or sows. That's where we ran into the arthritic problem.

We worked through that one. Our culling wasn't really excessive by any means. We dropped all our shoulder injuries to a point where they were almost non-existent, once they got up and got the traction going. What we run into now more than anything is probably dewclaws and toes. When you watch what happens in more cases than not, you will have an animal sitting on the slat, generally sitting, to some degree, and two other animals will come by for whatever reason and they will hit her in the head, slightly, and spin her around. And if she has a dewclaw or a toe that happens to be sitting in the slat properly, you will get an injury.

And I would say that that's probably our leading factor that we cull sows on for injuries in that facility, more than anything. Some of the old issues that we used to deal with are non-existent today.

John V: For me, I used to cull quite a bit for feet and legs and toes. I really don't have that problem anymore. When the sows were in the stalls, they had some pretty extreme toes, and really long, and some of the reasons, that's why I had to cull some of these good sows. Today, I actually have probably only two in my barn that actually have a couple long toes.

Their dewclaws still do get growing, but as far as the toes themselves, I really don't have any problems because they're walking on that cement all the time. I'm probably 1/3 slats and the other 2/3's is cement, so when they walk on that cement, it probably wears it off a little bit. And I think that's probably the best benefit that I have. And my cull rate, I'm still 50% cull rate right now, and my average parity is, I guess, around 5, which actually hasn't changed too much.

I feel like when I'm culling sows, 15% of my sows are actually jumbos, so that's over 600 pounds. And the next 75% of my pigs are over 500, so if I can ship a sow that's in good shape and I can ship it for a good price, I can buy that replacement gilt with money in my pocket yet. So that's what I'm kind of working on. And I feel that the replacements are just getting better all the time anyhow, so. When I looked at this guy with SPF herd and he was having a 100% cull rate and his reason for doing that is because the next one is that much better, so that's what I'm doing.

Adam: So when we did our transition, our herd was actually fairly young. We had just done a depop as part of the farrowing barn expansion, so our average parity was 2 or 2.5 when we started things. So we weren't culling all that much at that point. What I can say is yeah, you do see

claw injuries in the pen. Not many of them, but we watch for them. We pull them out if they're limping. I have the luxury of having both stalls and loose housing, so if I see an injury like that, I can put a girl in a stall and let her recover, put her in a hospital pen. So the same goes for some girls that won't train. If you're purely loose housing, you don't really have a lot you can do with those girls and you have to cull. I can put her back in the stall and show her a long productive life, there, too. So there's certain advantages to that mixed approach.

John O: Our gestation barns are stalls, our average parity would be shorter than the ones these guys are quoting here, so.

Audience: Shorter?

John O: Shorter, yeah. Just because we're going to turn some sows over to sizing issues in stalls, but also the legs and some sows just getting out. When I was in the loose housing barns in Quebec and that, I did find that sows move around a lot more fluid, they're a lot more active, and they're just getting more mileage out of those sows, and the only con in a unit that we were in, that 2700 of Julie Menard's, there was one sow that they had to actually pull out. They had a recovery pen for it, and they had a number of series recovery pens in that barn, and that was the only sow in that whole unit that was in that pen. So I was very pleased with what I saw, those animals being very able to walk through. And I don't know what her average parity, it's still quite a young herd that's in there, but I'm thinking this is going to be the right way. You're going to get a little more longevity out of your sows.

John V: I would say for culling, like, I don't really have any reason for culling just because the problem's in the loose housing. Either periodically, you do get a claw that might be broken and then it does come up the computer right away because they're the ones that are not eating, so you just put them in a stall. But there are always different reasons for culling.

When I get to parity five, that's when I say it's coming close to age, and then you look at the sow. How good are her feet and legs, how good is her body, how good is her udder, how good is the weight of the pigs? You got to take all of these things into consideration. And do you have replacements for her?

So, other than that, I'm not really necessarily culling aggressively more, because they're loose housing, I don't think so at all. I think actually less because the toes and feet are that much better.

Doug: So I'll go back to say that all the systems are different, to the point that what we've noticed in the last year and a half since we built the gilt facility, most of our injuries are in the gilt facility, right? They can't navigate the slats, they're the ones that are little bit limited on their feet, or they don't want to participate. We make those culls before they

happen, and we're noticing that the culls are going down in our bigger barn now.

The animals that are heading out are, like, they know how to use the system, and that's making them change. The longevity side of it is that, that John talks about, it'd be interesting to see because these animals are getting bigger and the worst of most of our retrofitted barns are, is our farrowing crates are not big enough for them, so it's still going to hold our parity down, right? I'm afraid that these loose house sows are going to get big, quicker.

John V: I was in Europe this year and I was going through a 1000 sow operation, and the thing that they do with their ESF, which is different than mine, is that I feel here in North America, we're feeding animals to the maximum feed to where the production is great. There, they're trying to limit the feed to see where the production starts falling. So when I walked around that barn, I looked at a lot of sows that if they walked through my barn, they would say they are fat. When I look at their barn, I'd say they're under-conditioned. But that's, their feed expense is extreme out there compared to what ours is, and so that's a difference between two different countries. I know when I first started up my ESF, I had sows that got stuck in the corridor, and it was just that big. So, now all of a sudden, I really am fine-tuning my sows. They're really in good shape, and I do believe the system works great for that, but it's a tool that you have to work with.

Moderator: Question?

Audience: Yeah. Comments on those who moved from stalls to loose housing. Did you notice anything, like a drop in still-born rate, for example, was that significant? Or, I just assume the sows are more physically fit, they probably farrow a little better?

John V: I'll tell you, I was expecting that exact same thing, but I haven't seen it yet. That's what I'm going on so far. So I'm hoping to see that, and that's what I was expecting, but I have not.

Doug: And I would have to coincide with John on that one, cause like I said, we have the old herd. I was very concerned with it, to the point that generally, once you get passed that 6 or 7th parity, you need attendants at farrowing in one way or another. We run a small herd, we have one herdsman and family members in the barn. We're not always there during all of the farrowing, so a lot of it happens on its own overnight in one way or another. We were pleasantly surprised that our stillborns actually went down on the first sows going through the farrowing rooms. And saying that, we already had a lot of high parity sows going through, right? And even today, even with some of those 14s and 15s that are no longer there anymore, they were still farrowing at night on their own, putting out 14 and 15 pigs and maybe having one stillborn behind them. It was phenomenal, the pace that these sows can farrow once they get a muscle tone.

Adam: So in our particular case, it's a little different to compare production numbers from before the barn switch over and after, because the day that I loaded up my ESF system, I got word from the farrowing rooms that we had PRRS in that barn. So, the immediate differences were sort of hard to measure over time. What I can say, though, is we don't need to assist farrowing at all. There's maybe one or two, but practically speaking, they farrow amazing well, so we don't really have to worry about it.

Jennifer: I can comment on that, on the research perspective side of things. Certainly there's studies that have been done in Europe suggesting lower stillborns, but unless you're actually tracking this statistically, you might go from like a 1.5 to a .9 and you're not going to notice that really on a day to day basis, but if you collect that data and look at the variation, it could be statistically significant.

Moderator: Question in the back?

Audience: Yeah, for the dynamic groups, is there a minimum number of sows that you would add to those groups, or can you add one at a time, or ten is the number, or?

Jennifer: No, you definitely want to add a group. If you add one at a time, that individual's, of course, going to be the target of any aggression. So, yeah, John is using say a free mixing pen, so his group gets formed before they go in the group. The recommendation is at least 10% of the entire group, so if you have 100 sows, you should be adding at least 10 at a time so that any focus of aggression gets distributed over a group instead of directed at one individual.

Adam: Yeah, I think I'd second that. Our pens are about 250 animals and we're typically adding or removing about 25 or 30 per pen in a given week.

Doug: One thing that we've noticed is that when you're adding pigs to the group, generally the one that wants to fight is the one that just entered. It's not the ones that are already there. It's funny how somebody that's new in the room seems to think they're extra special. But the real world shows up and she learns that she's no different than anyone else.

John V: Yeah, I'm doing the same, I'm actually entering 10 a week and taking 10 out, generally. So it is pretty much 10%. And yeah, if you just put one individual in there, there's going to be one individual running around looking for a friend, and you'll be seeing her walking around looking all over the place and she'll be going crazy. So you really got to keep that social hierarchy together. That is a must.

Moderator: Questions?

Audience: Yeah, how many days before their due date do you try to have them moved to farrowing?

John V: I'm actually putting mine in almost a week before, like mine generally would go in on a Monday and they're farrowing on Friday, so not necessarily a week but five days mine are in the stall.

Doug: We're averaging about five days. That's one thing you'll learn when you go to loose housing and especially with ESF feeders and selection sorting and anything else, and anything you wanted to do today, you want to be thinking about a day before, right? And just because you think you want to do it today, it may take you two more days to finish that. So that's whether you're looking for animals for a farrowing crate or whether you're looking for animals to vaccinate, it's an ongoing process. Our selection area, I get really upset with our system on occasion because yeah, we got a slight hiccup and it's just not working right and generally it does work really well, but our selection area is being used every day of the week and we don't have time for things like that because we never finish one project 100%. There's always those two sows that are smarter than the rest that get by the selection gate and they can do it day after day after day and you either wait and wait and wait or you go and find her. And then that becomes another exercise, to go and get, too. So yeah, it's a whole different way of dealing with things.

Adam: So I'd say pretty much the exact same thing you just said. It's the four to five days just to give yourself a bit of a window to find a girl who may not have been selected out. There are ways to help that along a little bit. If you've got a marker on your feed station, that's a great time to mark her and then you can go out and find her really easily. We're actually doing vaccinations that way rather than sorting them out. Because the sort on any given day will do 75, somewhere between 75 and 90%, you do that a couple of days over, you get 99%, but there's still that one girl that you've got to go find.

Moderator: Other question?

Audience: I think Adam just partially answered, but how much time is involved over stalls? Cause you know, stalls you know exactly where she is. How much time would you spend on a daily basis looking for these sows? It sounds like a great idea having spray markers so that you know how to find her?

Adam: Well, it's a different way to manage. When she's in a stall, you know exactly where she is, but, so your daily work flow changes a little bit in a barn, I think, when you go to loose housing. You start your day, you ask the computer who ate, who didn't. The ones that didn't, well, you evaluate whether or not you'll find her or not. You can have any number of reasons to go out and find a sow. What you should do is sort of compile a list of all the girls you're looking for and before you start going out and doing your rounds, and then you're just walking the pen and you look for a couple. And if you planned ahead, you have them marked. That'll help you find some. But you know, the girl that didn't eat, either you see her limping or something like that, then she's

relatively easy to find, but she won't have a mark on her. So she's the one that's trickier to find. When you walk the pen every day, you get to know which sows are in which locations and you know, the girls that were entered in any given group, if you find one of them, half a dozen of her friends are right beside her. So it's not as bad as you think it is. It's a little bit daunting when you start, but you develop the right habits to make it work. As far as actual numbers and time taken, I don't know how to answer that specifically.

John V: On the system I have, you got three spray markers, so you can spray mark for every indication that you want. You can sort them all, too. When I come in the barn first thing in the morning, I'm looking at my computer and I open up the program and it says tasks, and the tasks are a number of the pigs go into the farrowing crate, sows that coming back into heat, all things that are on there for tasks are things that have to be done that day.

You just click on that task and it says what sows are going to be coming in and tells you exactly how far they're in their gestation. All you have to do is put on a quick entry, click beside their numbers in the box, say this one, this one, this one, and the next day, they're all sorted to the side. So, except for right now because I'm having interference with my turbine, I'm only getting 70%. So that reader right there that's reading for the sorter is the one that's giving me the problems with the turbine, otherwise everything else is fine. And the funny thing is, it worked all winter. It was working great. And then when it got to spring, I was having a problem. I says, there's a problem with this thing, it's not working. So we figure it was interference with the turbine. They put a filter on my turbine, it worked for another couple months, and then it had problems again. And believe it or not, what the real problem is, the ground is dry, there's not a conductor there. So you know, stupid things can really throw wrenches into this technology. You need an IT guy to figure it out and I haven't found him yet.

Jennifer: So yeah, I would just comment more on finding sows and groups. Certainly, you know, these are three producers, going on four, with the dynamic group system, but certainly you can run an ESF system as a static group, or you can have your smaller group systems and then you're not really looking for sows.

Everybody's at the same stage of parity and they're all ready to go and in the farrowing crate, so as much as you can see there's an appeal, an attraction to going to these large, dynamic groups, there are some advantages to those small, static groups cause everybody's ready to go to the farrowing room at the same time. None of this searching around for who's ready and who's not.

Moderator: Another question?

Audience: **When sows are selected to go to the farrowing room, are they apprehensive once coming out of the pens and are they more difficult than they were in the stall situation?**

John V: I tell you, my place when I open up that gate, they're gone. And it's amazing, they just run out, they just see the open gate and they go. Just like, they are incredibly easy to move around. I don't have a problem at all. Sometimes you got to slow them down.

Doug: Yeah, we find the same thing. We'll select 30 to 35 animals for farrowing crates and we'll go back and make sure they're all there that we think are supposed to be there and then we'll bring up 10, so they have to run up my stall barn along one row, along a wall. We let 10 in and we generally have to run behind them, because the last thing we want them to do is have one turn around at the far end and hold the whole group up. But generally as a rule, they'll run up there and by the time we get to the farrowing room with them, 85% of them will be standing in a farrowing crate. It's phenomenal how these animals move now.

And I use the example last night, it's almost like they were given personalities we never recognised in the stall. They have the ability now not to worry about corners and shadows, sun coming in a window and a door, a breeze through an entranceway, all that kind of stuff. They are just, they're so street smart now to the point that they're just completely different animals in how you work with them.

Adam: All I can do is agree with John and Doug, there. They walk and easily run.

Moderator: Another question?

Audience: **Could we have a comment tagging, like RFID tags and what happens when they fall off and the tag's in the gutter and the sows trying to go through, or they just don't stay in the ears?**

John V: Yeah, periodically you're losing ear tags. You can get disposable ones that are actually one-time ear tags, they're about \$3 a piece. Or you can get the ones that last longer, they're about \$9 a piece. Of course, when you lose a \$9 tag, you're pretty upset but these \$9 tags, you can clip them off and reuse them.

So you can use them and use them and use them and you can put safety caps on where they actually last a little longer. So I don't find that that's a real big cost. It's initial cost, but the replacements, like I said, you can use the one-time replacements, or you can use the more durable ones, but then you can reuse them, so.

Audience: What does your system do when there's no tags? Like, when the sow's there?

John V: Well, with my system actually, I have to have it off now because of my interference, but otherwise there's an ID check, and so you can automatically spray mark them or you can automatically sort them. So, you just put that entry in there. If you say you want an ID check and you want it automatically sorted if she does not have an ear tag.

And so what happens is they walk down that corridor, and if that corridor pad does not read a number and a door opens, that program automatically knows that she does not have an ear tag. So the problem that I've been having with this interference, I was getting everyone. So, right now that system does work as long as you don't have interference.

Adam: Yeah, the software accounts for stuff like that, so in my system, there's an electronic eye so it knows when a feeder's occupied or not.

Doug: Our system uses a combination of an electric eye and strategic places them, and the door readers also, they'll select an animal out. Talking about retention side of it, we spend a fair bit of time, I don't know why we do that, some people don't seem to have that much problem, but it's a bigger issue than I think it needs to be. I don't know why, I never find them so they're not caught and stuck in something. We're not only losing the RFIDs, we're also losing the big tags in some cases, with the animal ID on it that we use physically for identifying an animal, right? That's the one from traceability that's supposed to have all the ISO 9000 standards built around it not to rip the ear and it's supposed to stay in, so we're still losing those ones, too. One of the biggest things we found was making sure that when we put the RFID, they're always making it high enough in the ear so that the sow's around it can't play with it because it is a bigger tag and thicker tag and if you put it out near the end of the ear, we found that the other sows like to treat it like bubble gum. So location means a lot.

Adam: So just regarding retention, we started using the pig trace tags with the RFID tag built in. We weren't happy with how many of those were both failing and being lost. So we moved now to just the standard traceability tag, but with a button tag for the RFID, and that's working better but it's still early stages yet.

Moderator: I've got one question, maybe mostly for Adam. In terms of feeding sows, cause you still have crates and you still have ESF, do you find a difference in feed consumption? Does the movement around in ESF cause you to use more feed, or do you waste less feed, or do you not notice a difference? We hear a lot about precision feeding, how much more precise, or do you feel there's a difference?

Adam: It's a good question that I wish I had a good answer for. It's the sort of thing where I have to sit down and crunch some numbers and that hasn't been the priority yet. So now that I've got a system up and running, now I get to iterate on it and make it work better, and part of that is going to be looking at studies like that.

Moderator: Do you notice more variation with body condition between the stalls and the group housing?

Adam: We are incredibly happy with what we see in the loose housing. So, we are definitely feeding based on body condition score. That has helped amazingly well. And frankly, we like our sows to be a little bit lean when most people come into our barn, they think they're a little thin. But with the genetics we have, they work really well like that. But the stations themselves are very good at getting them uniform. Especially when you're going to find a girl and she's a little bit thin, you bump up the ration a little bit. The hard part there is when you've got a thin girl and she's getting 10% extra feed, you go to catch her again before she gets fat. So, it's -- that's one of those jobs that you wouldn't have thought of at the start where, you know, at some point, maybe three weeks down the line, you should go look and find the girls that are thin and then verify that they're actually still thin or if they're 3's now, maybe you can bump their ration down.

John V: I would say my sows are a lot better shape now because ESF, they're just getting exactly what they require, no more, no less. If you watch your sows with the drops in the pen there's always sows that push feed to the next sow, there's always one that gets a lot more just because of the way they eat. And they're all different that way. With this ESF, they're just getting exactly what they require as far as you put in there.

And one thing I would like to say, if you're going to an ESF system like this or something different, if you look at the barns, look across these barns, there's just not the dust collection that there used to be. If you got all them drops and all them cables and everything like that going through all your barn, there's a lot of dust and a lot of cobwebs collecting there, now it's just like everybody wants their kitchen open concept, well this is the same thing with our barns now. Open concept, you don't have a lot, it's a lot easier cleaning and you can see right across. I do like that.

Doug: We also body score. I probably don't notice it as much as the visitors coming into the barn about how big them pigs are because I work with them every day of the week, right? I do concur with Adam that when you actually raise a sow on feed, you got to be darn sure that you remember she's there and you got to look after her. So what we traditionally do is that about every three weeks, we generally collect our sows that we actually are feeding more to, strictly so we can put them in the holding area and view them again. It's just easier than going out and finding those animals individually because that can be a pain in the butt.

John V: With these probes, too, you can walk around there. That probe will tell you, if you think there's a fat sow, you click that number with the probe and that's going to tell you what curve she's on. So if it says she's too fat or she's getting that much extra feed, you can condition score right there and the next time she comes in there, she's going to get more or less, just like that. So, I mean, that's all it is, just a management thing. You

just walk around, you say well, I got a fat sow, well I'll just see what her RFID number is, tells exactly what her condition score is, tells what she's getting fed. You can adjust her right there. And then you're doing it ongoing, so it's just a matter of walking around and adjusting.

Moderator: **Just for the sake of argument, I'd say it's just as easy in a crated barn, but I see 99% of them set to about 2-4 pounds, about 2 kilos, so I'm just going to drive this a little bit more. How many, 80% of your sows in ESF get the same amount of feed? Or 40% of them get a special diet, or up and down?**

Doug: So these systems can do many different things and I think, if I remember correctly, it's amazing how when you get something set up, you almost forget about it and move on to the next issue you have in the barn. I think we have four different feed curves that we have sows set up on, and then within that parities are fed different amounts, speeds, whether the amount is dropped or the amount of clean up time. They're incredibly complex in how you can operate them. But I think a fair answer would be is 80% of them are all getting pretty much the same amount of the feed as everybody else. Maybe by parity, you know, or by speed of which they eat. But it does give you the opportunity to do those things that you need to do with those extra few sows, so what we do is at 35 days confirmed pregnant, when we go to let our sows out, we actually do the body score at that point in time.

Because we have to go through and identify those animals because we still treat our gilts a little bit different when we send them out because we don't put them out right away with the big girls. We'll send them through the training area that was held at station 5. So they get treated different. If there's thin sows, we will record that the day before because we have to walk those sows to make sure that everybody's got an RFID and it's working, because that doesn't always happen.

John V: I'm doing a condition score actually as they enter the ESF, so I just, basically looking at them, if they're thin, I would give them a different condition score other than just ideal, or fat, same thing. I'm starting with gilts get the gilt standard, and then you've got five condition scores there. The standard sow, just the same thing. And if they're a big sow, then she starts on a big sow.

And I have been starting, and this has been kind of driven to me by a nutritionist is that -- this is a European thing -- is that they're probing their sows before and after farrowing. And what you're looking for is that they're not losing more than 3mm of back fat. If they are, that's when you give them a condition score or you adjust your condition score. So, that is actually in my program, but we started it, but we're not necessarily using it a 100% yet. Yeah, sometimes too many options.

Adam: So there's also the opportunity to automate the feed curve so they can get a little more towards the end of gestation.

John V: Yeah, I mean, that's in my feed curve, too, but day 85, they get an increase, and that's the efficiency of the ESF is that you're punching their insemination date, and it starts on their insemination date. So mine actually start with a little bit of an increase, and then they actually decrease a little bit halfway through their gestation and then day 85, you get an increase.

And that's one thing you can't do necessarily in stalls all the time, you can't necessarily walk around and adjust every stall. Whereas this is just automatic. You just put in their insemination date and it starts.

Moderator: Anymore questions? One more?

Audience: Yeah, so sorry, I maybe missed it but are you guys feeding two feeds, then, in the ESF, or just one?

Adam: Right now we're just feeding one and we're varying quantity.

Audience: If you could do it again, would you go with two? Would you add it in for the extra \$500?

Adam: I think it's nice to have the option, I think there are other things we can be doing to try to optimise the system first. So, there's nothing about my system that prevents me from adding that later, which is one of the pros of the designs that we've chosen. But for now, I think we're happy with the one ration and if it ever seems necessary to add a second one, we can revisit that.

John V: Yeah, I'm actually feeding two rations. Of course my sows are separate from my gilts, and so the gilts get a gilt ration. And after the first parity, that's when they go back onto a sow ration. So I'm feeding two rations, and I do have the option there, the hopper above the ESF has two augers so you can actually blend. But I'm only using the one.

Adam: So maybe I should clarify. We do not tend to put a lot of gilts through our ESF system, unless I'm short of space. So I've got a separate facility for gilt breeding. They go into stalls there for the first parity and then I can put a few back into my system. You want to try to keep them approximately the same size or approximately the same parity in any given group as much as is possible, and the gilts are just smaller. So we had one or two turns where we were adding gilts and they just got picked on, and the gilts came out and we try not to put them back. So, that's another factor in the feeding side of things.

Audience: According to Quincy's presentation beforehand, it dramatically changes that last, whatever days of gestation. So to have two rations, like not to break it up parity wise, you're looking to break it up during that one sow's lactation, so assuming that Quincy's right on what he's saying, it could be a huge benefit to feeding two feeds. Right? Unless I'm mistaken, so with the opportunity to put two feeds in would you not just start with two feeds to utilise that, or am I not looking at it right?

Adam: No, I think you're looking at it exactly right. I don't know about anybody else on the panel, but I was really apprehensive about making this step in the first place and so a lot of the decisions we made were made to give us flexibility in the future. So, let's start simple and then as problems are identified, we can fine tune things later. So we can add, I can radically change my pen design, I can add new feeds, I can change my sorting protocol, I can put mats down. Cause right now I'm fully slatted. Things like that. So start simple and then -- now it's time for me to start fine tuning. Completely agree.

Doug: We were the same way, four years ago. One feed was all anybody was ever feeding, there wasn't even any thoughts about it. Most stall barns only had one feed system in, right? So they had one drag of some sort and you fed everybody the same, only different amounts. Today, whole different thing. If you're ordering a system, make sure you order it with two feeds. For me, I could put two feeds in mine and only have one. But I have to go back to programming, right? So, changes, we're looking at making changes now already. I've even questioned since this seminar whether -- because they're going to charge me to reprogram -- should I have them reprogram for two feeds and make sure I have it in my system for flexibility down the road and then I only have to add the hardware.

John's system's a little bit different again, because ultimately he breeds loose housing and gestates in loose housing, completely. And Adam and I, we're 35-dayers, right? You know, so we have the ability in the stall to feed a one ration up to the 35 days, and Quincy has become my newest friend because it's been one of the biggest challenges for me trying to figure out how to feed this sow that now has exercise. And I come to pretty much just put in what I thought they needed because I, in a lot of cases, a lot of people, they knew the nutritional requirements, but they didn't know how to keep the animal comfortable or what she would really require. So I think at 35 days, that other feed tank that we run back to the loose housing farm, maybe we can come up with a different ration there that will at least split it from breeding to getting ready for the farrowing room, right? So, it might be an option that we can exercise to better perform our one-feed feed stations at this point. But if you're ordering one today, make sure you got it in.

Moderator: Okay, thank you very much.

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